

UNITED STATES PERMANENT MISSION TO THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20520

MEMORANDUM

October 2, 1979

TO: Ambassador McGee
FROM: *RGJ* Irving G. Tragen
SUBJECT: IAHRC Visit to Argentina

Department of State, A/GIS/IPS/SRP
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IPS by *RT* Date *10-2-79*

I lunched today with Edmundo Vargas Carreno, who advised me that the visit to Argentina, despite some very difficult situations, went extremely well. He said that they received over 6,000 complaints, many of them on behalf of "disappeared prisoners." They also visited seven major concentration points of political prisoners and had contact with about 2,000.

Vargas pointed out that the situation in Argentina is very different than that in Chile. In Chile, the Pinochet government was in complete control of all actions taken, while in Argentina, under the State of Siege, local military leaders have been able to act on their own without having to respond to any central authority. Under these circumstances, there has been considerable abuse of authority and people imprisoned for nothing more than personal whim, anti-semitism, or other reasons. He feels that most of the disappeared in Argentina are in fact dead, but some may still be alive in unidentified detention centers.

He indicated that President Videla and his immediate advisers were very cooperative, but pointed out that several Generals were hostile. General Menendez in Cordoba, who was relieved of his Command last weekend, had told the Commission when he met with them that he was offended by his orders to discuss strictly Argentine matters with foreigners. Other military Commanders were equally outspoken about the decision of the Argentine government to permit the IAHRC to make a visit.

He pointed out that on a couple of occasions, lack of discretion by employees of the Commission had created potential problems and that he, Vargas, was under constant pressure because of the need to keep the IAHRC staff working tactfully with their Argentine colleagues. On one occasion he found an IAHRC senior staffman demanding the blueprints

for an Argentine military installation in which political prisoners were detained. The fact that the GOA even allowed them to visit the center was an accomplishment which was almost negated by this lack of judgment. Vargas indicated that some changes would have to be made in the IAHRRC staff to make certain that these kinds of incidents do not recur.

Vargas feels that the release of Timmermans and the removal of Menendez were in part the favorable aftermath of the IAHRRC's visit.

It is unlikely that the IAHRRC will report to IX OASGA on its Argentine inspection trip. The Commissioners are still evaluating the information compiled and are trying to put together a three-page outline around which a report can be written. Vargas is concerned about pressure from the USG to present a premature report. He referred to a letter the Commission received from Congressmen Edwards and Lagomarsino demanding an IAHRRC report to the IX OASGA or face the charge of a sell-out to the GOA. He noted that the language paralleled that used by Larry Birns in similar pronouncements. I assured him that USOAS understood the IAHRRC's predicament, and that we would support the IAHRRC's decision to take the time necessary to prepare a sound report rather than a premature one which could trigger problems like those caused in the wake of its Nicaragua report.

Copies to: Mr. Yohn
Ms. Alvarez

/mab

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